Languages Spoken in Chitral: A Brief Description

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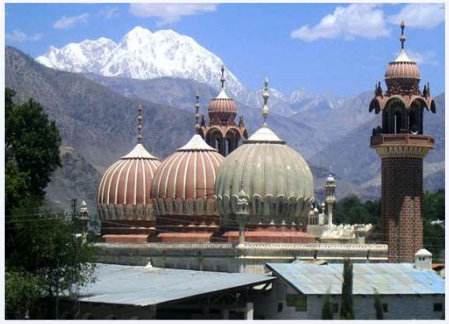
Chitral Valley, situated in the extreme north of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in Pakistan. With a population of half-million, the valley is home to speakers of more than ten languages. While some of these languages are indigenous to the valley, others have been brought by immigrants from neighbouring areas and countries. The languages of the Chitral Valley are classified into three main language families: Iranian, Indo-Aryan, and Nuristani. The population size of speakers varies widely, from a few hundred individuals to several hundred thousand.

Dameli (دمیلی)

Dameli (ISO 639-3: dml) is spoken in several remote villages in a side valley called Damel in southern Chitral. This language is also known by alternate names such as Damia, Damia baasha, and Gidoji. It is classified within the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family. Dameli has been substantially influenced by Pashto and Nuristani languages. The population of Dameli speakers is estimated to be around 6,000 and the number is increasing. Dameli is written language and books in the language have been authored by community people.



Gawarbati (گورباتی)

Gawarbati (ISO 639-3: gwt) is an Indo-Aryan language. It is also known as Kohistani, Narsati, and Arandui. Gawarbati speakers predominantly live along the Kunar River, especially along the Pak-Afghan border area. In Chitral, the main village of Gawarbati speakers is Arandu. However, most of the villages of this language's speakers are located across the border in the Kunar province of Afghanistan. The total estimated number of users of the language in both countries is around 12,000, with around 4,000 speakers living inside Chitral, Pakistan. Unfortunately, the number of speakers is decreasing, and many are switching to the Pashto language. It is written language and books in the language are available.

Gojri (گوجری)

Gojri (ISO 639-3:gju) is a widely spread language in the subcontinent, also found in Chitral and its neighbouring country, Afghanistan. The language is classified within the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family. In Chitral, most Gojri-speaking villages are situated in the southern part, within valleys known as Shishikoh, Bumboret, Rumbur, Urchun, and in the Arandu Sub-Tehsil in the main valley. Historically, Gojars of Chitral were pastoralists, moving with their herds of goats to higher pastures in the summers and lower pastures in the winters. Nowadays, they have settled in villages. Gojri speakers began arriving in Chitral in the second half of the 19th century. The estimated number of Gojri speakers is around 11,000. In Chitral there are some poets of the language, but the language is not use for any literary activities.

Kalasha (کالاشہ)

Kalasha (ISO 639-3: kls), also known as Kalashamon, is spoken in four valleys: Birir, Rumbur, Bumboret, and Urtsun. These valleys are all located on the right bank of the Chitral River in the southern part of Chitral. The language of each valley differs slightly from the others but is mutually understood. The number of Kalasha speakers is around 6,500, but the number is decreasing sharply. Many Kalasha people are shifting to Khowar. As a written language it has been taught in community schools in Bumboret for many years.

Khowar (کھوار)

The Khowar-speakers are the largest linguistic community in Chitral, and the language is also use as a lingua franca in in the valley. This language is also known as Qashqari by Pashto speakers. It is classified within the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family. Besides Chitral, Khowar is also spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan and in the Swat Valley. The estimated number of Khowar speakers in all regions is more than 600,000, with a population of 400,000 in Chitral alone. Khowar is a well-read language, with books, magazines, radio and TV programs, and audio/video documentation. It has been included in the school curriculum since 2017.

Katévïri (کتہ وری)

Katéviri (ISO 639-3: bsh), also known as Kati, is a Nuristani language, spoken in the upper portion of northeastern Nuristan. The speakers of this language migrated to Chitral in the past, with most of them arriving at the end of the nineteenth century. In Chitral, the language is also known as Shekhani, Nuristani and Bashgaliwar. There are three villages where the language is spoken in Chitral: Shekhandeh, Konisht, and Goboor, located in the Bumboret, Rumbur, and Lotkoh side valleys, respectively. The total population of these villages is 4,500 and the number is increasing . The Katévëri in Chitral is a written language, and many people from the community are struggling to preserve and promote it. They have also authored some books in the language.

Kamviri (کمویری)

Kamviri (ISO 639-3: xvi]) is also a Nuristani language, spoken in the lower portion of southeastern Nuristan. The speakers of this language emigrated to Chitral at various times and settled in southern Chitral. The language is also known as Shekhani, Nuristani, and Bashgaliwar in Chitral. The villages where the speakers live are Badrogal, Langurbat, and Akroi. Some individual families also live in the Urtsun side valley.

Kateviri and Kamviri languages are mutually intelligible, and according to many linguists, both are varieties of the same language. However, some treat them as separate languages. The estimated population of speakers living in Chitral is 3,000 and the number is decreasing. Speakers are shifting to Pashto and Khowar.

Madaklashti (مدکلشتی)

Madaklashti is a dialect of Dari (Persian) spoken in Afghanistan. The language is spoken in the upper part of the Shishikoh side valley called Madaklasht, located 30 km north of Drosh town. This community has been present in Chitral for over 200 years, having migrated from Afghanistan. The number of Madaklashti speakers is around 4,000 and the number is increasing. There are many poets of the language, and some have authored poetry books.

Palula (پاولا)

Palula (ISO 639-3: phl) is an Indo-Aryan language. In Chitral, the language is spoken in the south, in Ashret and Biori valleys, as well as in the villages Kalkatak and Purigal. Some speakers also live in Dir Kohistan. The number of Palula speakers is more than 11,000 and the number is increasing. It is now a written language, and the community is striving to preserve and promote their mother tongue. Many books have been authored by community people.

Pashto (پشتو)

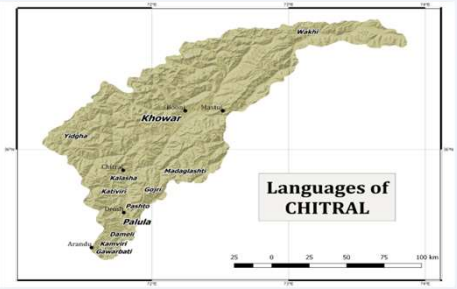
Pashto (ISO 639-3: ps), also known as Pashtu or Afghani, is the second most spoken language in the Chitral Valley, with over 25,000 speakers. Local Khowar speakers refer to it as Alghaniwar or Pokhto. Most Pashto-speaking villages are located in the southern part of the valley, near the Afghan and Dir borders. In Chitral and Drosh towns, there are shops operated by Pashto speakers. Most Pashto speakers in Chitral are multilingual, with proficiency in languages like Khowar. Pashtuns have been a part of Chitral since the late 19th century. There is limited literary activity in the language, although some Pashto poets contribute to the region's literary heritage. Additionally, there are radio programs broadcast in Pashto from Chitral town.

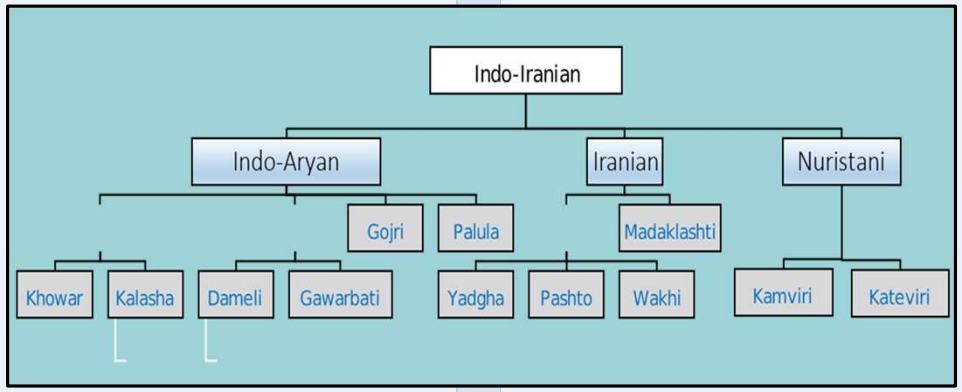
Wakhi (وخی)

Wakhi (ISO 639-3: wbl) is a widely spoken language in the Pamir region, encompassing Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Pakistan. The native homeland of the language is Wakhan, a narrow corridor in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan that separates Pakistan from Tajikistan. The name "Wakhi" is derived from Wakhan. Families from Wakhi migrated to Broghil, the extreme north of the Chitral valley, which is adjacent to Wakhan. The current number of speakers in Broghil is approximately 1,500. Wakhi belongs to the Iranian branch of Indo-European languages. Although it is largely an unwritten language, it is used by the community in most domains of their day-to-day life.

Yadgha (یدغا)

Yadgha (ISO 639-3: ydg), also known as Lutkohiwar, is spoken in the Lutkoh Valley, situated approximately 46 km west of Chitral town. The Yadgha people trace their origins to the Munjan valley in Afghanistan, having migrated to the Lutkoh Valley 31 generations ago. The Yadgha community consists of around 6,000 speakers, although this number is gradually decreasing. Speakers of the language are shifting to Khowar, the lingua franca of Chitral valley. In many villages, the language is no longer being passed on to the younger generation. Yadgha is a written language, and several poets compose poetry in it. However, limited literacy activities are currently underway to support the language's preservation





Other Languages

There are also a few families who speak Sariquli (ISO 639-3: srh) and Kirghiz (ISO 639-3: kir) in Baroghil, in the area where Wakhi is also spoken. Sariquli is a Pamiri language of the Iranian branch of Indo-European, while Kirghiz is a Turkic language. Families speaking those two languages migrated to the area in the mid-20th century from nearby countries. Sariquli is on the verge of extinction in Chitral, surrounded by Wakhi and Khowar languages, and young people born to bilingual parents do not learn it. The Kirghiz community in Chitral, however, is notable for its strong attachment to its language, which is passed on to younger generations. According to the 2017 census report, there are 5,363 speakers collectively of Hindko, Punjabi, Saraiki, Sindhi, and Kashmiri in Chitral.

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